

Remarks of Nancy Field  
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Before the Program Review and Investigations Committee & Education Committee  
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Good afternoon members of the Education Committee and the Program Review and Investigations Committee. My name is Nancy Field and I'm a Library Media Specialist in Windsor. I'm here today to comment on Raised Bill 329 and Raised Bill 330 pertaining to the BEST program.

When I read the report and the recommendations of this committee, I was pleased to see the recognition that new teachers need skilled mentors at their grade level or in their content area at the secondary level, and that they need significant time to work together. This report emphasizes the importance of the mentor-mentee relationship which helps new teachers develop the necessary skills to teach, and teach well, in today's classroom. From my perspective, the recommendations bring the BEST program much closer to its original purpose; to provide the training and support necessary to new teachers so they may become highly competent teachers meeting the standards required by the state of Connecticut.

My mentor was the most influential person of my teaching career because her hard work helped me to become a good teacher. I started my teaching career 20 years ago as a first grade teacher. The year I began teaching was one of the early pilot years of BEST. I was observed 11 times and a team of two assessors did 5 of those observations. This process did little to help me grow professionally. There was no opportunity after each observation to meet with the assessors to get immediate feedback about my areas of strength and where I needed to improve. The feedback I did receive was in the form of a checklist from each of the assessors; sometimes one would rate my performance on a specific item satisfactory, while the other did not.

I consider myself extremely fortunate because of my mentor. She was an experienced teacher interested in giving back to her profession. She had attended the state mentor training the year before. It was her abilities and insights that helped me develop and then refine my teaching. The mentoring experience taught me to continually reflect on my teaching in order to improve my students' learning.

My mentor was a highly skillful, experienced teacher. She was also a first grade teacher in my building. Her classroom was right next to mine and we had common planning time. Because of the proximity of our rooms we were able to meet before or after school if needed. Believe me, we used that time extensively.

At that time the state provided money for release days, I believe we had eight half-days release time. Some days we used to work together. Some of the days were allocated for me to observe her modeling a specific skill she believed was necessary for me to master. Other days she observed me, looking carefully at what I was teaching well and what skills I needed to refine. Each time after our observations we would meet and go over what we saw and how I could use the knowledge to become a better teacher. My mentor would help me prepare my lesson for the state assessors. When I received the feedback forms I would show them to her and she would advise me how to incorporate the information into my lessons to improve my teaching.

As an important component of this pilot, the state supplied money for my mentor to receive a well-deserved stipend. At that time it was \$1,000. I know my mentor spent numerous hours working with me and the stipend was recognition of her professionalism and the importance of her job as a mentor.

As a new teacher I was often overwhelmed, and the State of Connecticut has high standards for its teachers. With the support of a talented experienced teacher, trained to be a mentor, I survived my first year of teaching. At that time, the pilot provided a mentor in the first year only. However, because of the relationship we developed

working together, she became the first person I would turn to for advice in my subsequent years of teaching. Without her, it's likely I would have left the profession.

I strongly believe that the mentor relationship is the most crucial element for new teachers to learn the art and skill of teaching well.

My district, Windsor, makes a concerted effort to make the BEST program as helpful as possible for new teachers. Prior to the beginning of school, new teachers attend an orientation program. At the district and building levels, mentor assignment is extremely important. New teachers are assigned a mentor who teaches at the same grade level, in the same building, on the elementary level. They are placed on the same team, in the same discipline at the middle school level. At the high school level, new teachers are assigned a mentor in their department. The district believes that common planning time at all levels creates some of the necessary time for the mentors and the new teachers to work together. Mentors and mentees are expected to attend a monthly program with a focus on the CCT. The program is divided by elementary, middle and high school so that the information is relevant and applicable for new teachers. The Board of Education and the WEA (Windsor Education Association) have negotiated a stipend for mentors. New teachers in their second year are provided tremendous support around the BEST portfolio. Next year the district plans to add a third year of support for new teachers in response to feedback from teachers. Additionally, Don Perras, a behavior consultant from Southern Connecticut State University observes new teachers and makes recommendations for them to improve classroom management. New teachers and their mentors will, at times, attend conferences together.

Within my own building, mentors take their role seriously and spend many long hours working with their assigned teacher. This form of collaboration is in addition to all of the expected responsibilities of a full time teacher; for example lesson planning, committee work, and professional development as well addressing the needs of their own students. Everyone in my school is aware of which teachers are working on their portfolios and do

whatever they can to help. The message is clear within my building, that a new teacher's success is of utmost importance. Our mentor teachers take this to heart.

I would like to thank the committee for their hard work. As these recommendations regarding BEST move forward, I would like to urge the committee to remain committed to providing new teachers skilled, trained mentors and to give new teachers the necessary time they need to work with their mentors.

Thank you for your time.